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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 003010

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/18/2017
TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL OSCE TU
SUBJECT: TURKEY: CATHOLIC PRIEST STABBED IN IZMIR

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, reasons 1.4 (b),(d)
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¶11. (C) Summary and comment: Police detained a 19-year old Turkish man shortly after he stabbed Italian Priest Adiano Franchini inside Izmir's St. Antoine Church on Sunday, December 16. Franchini, who survived the attack and is recovering well, said he would not press charges against the attacker, who he described as a mentally disturbed youth who acted on his own volition. Several Turkish Christians were reluctant to dismiss the possibility that the attack was not related to others in recent years, such as the murder of three Protestants in Malatya or the stabbing of a Catholic priest in Trabzon. One noted the attacker had said he had been influenced by "Valley of the Wolves," a popular ultranationalistic TV show that spewed rhetoric against Christian "missionaries." Even if this attack was the work of just one disturbed individual, it highlights a deeply troubling trend of intolerance toward Christians in Turkey. As one Catholic priest pointed out, Turkish society needs to undergo a shift in mentality before Christians will feel safe to practice openly their beliefs. End summary and comment.

Youth Stabs Catholic Priest

¶12. (SBU) A 19-year old Turkish man named Ramazan Bay stabbed 65-year old Italian Priest Adiano Franchini inside Izmir's St. Antoine Church on Sunday, December 16. Franchini survived the attack, and is recovering Izmir's Aegean University Hospital. Franchini has been working in Turkey for approximately 15 years as one of a handful of priests that serve Turkey's approximately 3,000 Catholics, most of whom reside in Istanbul and Izmir. For the past several years he had been the priest at Izmir's Virgin Mary Church. Police captured Bay outside a mosque where he had allegedly gone to confess to the local Imam and ask for advice. Franchini told a Vatican news agency that he will not press charges but will ask authorities to treat Bay for psychological problems. The GOT has not issued any statement regarding the attack. Izmir Governor Cahit Kirac visited Franchini paid a visit to the hospital and PM Erdogan dispatched two of his MPs to Izmir to offer condolences to Franchini.

Priest Says Attack Not Part of Conspiratorial Plot

¶ 13. (SBU) Italian and Vatican Embassy contacts who visited Franchini in the hospital told us the evidence thus far suggests the attacker was a mentally troubled individual who acted alone, not as part of any larger conspiracy against Christians in Turkey. Italian political counselor Lucio Demichele told us Franchini had known Bay for "some time" and thought him to be a young, angry person who had had run-ins with the law and with possible psychological problems. Franchini believed Bay had been arrested for "minor episodes" in the past. Just prior to the attack, Bay had asked Franchini to convert him to Christianity. Franchini, wary of Bay's mental stability, politely refused. Bay then took out a knife and stabbed Franchini in the stomach. Franchini said he believed the attack could have happened anywhere in the world.

Turkish Christians See Attack
as Sign of Societal Intolerance

¶ 14. (C) Several Human rights contacts told us they view the attack as another sign of a climate of increasing intolerance toward non-Muslims, citing several incidents in recent years: the brutal killing of three Protestants in Malatya, the stabbing of Catholic Priest Santoro in Trabzon, the murder of Hrant Dink, and the mob-beating of two Georgian priests near the Turkey-Georgia border. Ziya Meral, a Turk who converted to Christianity and now tracks attacks against Christians in Turkey as a consultant for Christian Solidarity Worldwide, told us the incident should not be written off as the

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spontaneous actions of a disturbed individual. Bay had said he had been influenced by "Valley of the Wolves," a popular ultranationalistic TV show that has aired at least three episodes about the murder of missionaries with "dark ties." This, and the fact that Bay was carrying a knife with him and was ready to attack after a three-minute conversation, showed his true intention, Meral believed.

¶ 15. (C) Orhan Kemal Cengiz, an attorney for several minority religious groups and President of the Human Rights Agenda Association, told us Turkey desperately needs to pass hate crime laws to eliminate on-line hate speech campaigns that help drive poor, uneducated youth to commit these attacks. Izmir Archbishop Ruggero Franceschini best represented the feelings of Christians in Turkey when he said following the attack that Christians would not feel safe in Turkey until there is a true change of mentality of Turks toward the Christian community. Franceschini pointed out that Turkish society called the perpetrators of attacks against Christians "unstable" or "psychopaths" in order to convince themselves the problem is limited in scope. In fact, he said, these attacks are signs of larger societal antipathy toward Christians.

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